



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE QUEEN'S PARLIAMENTS.

BY H. W. LUCY (TOBY, M. P., OF "PUNCH").

PART II.

I AM sometimes asked whether, in reviewing personal experience extending over nearly a quarter of a century, I observe any deterioration in the tone and manner of the House of Commons. With the suffrage widely extended, the consequent admission of working members, and the large leavening of the aristocratic mass with the professional and trading classes, it is assumed that the standard of the House must have been lowered. How great has been the change in this last respect since the Queen came to the throne is witnessed by the testimony of Mr. Gladstone, who calculates that there were not five members of the Conservative party of 1835 who sat in the House of Commons by reason of their connection with trade or industry. Is the House of Commons better or worse for the revolution in this respect that has taken place during the more than sixty years of the Queen's reign?

My humble opinion is that, on the whole, the sitting House of Commons, the latest product of almost manhood suffrage, is the best mannered I have known. In this respect it even runs the risk of being described as dull. But that is not a criticism to be safely adventured, as was shown by its predecessor, in the main equally well mannered, which one July night suddenly flared up in fierce free fight in presence of the shocked mace and the paralyzed Chairman of Committees. There are profound possibilities latent in any House of Commons. It is as uncertain as the sea, one moment a waste of placid smiling water, the next lashed into fury by a cyclone.

It is no new thing to hear the House of Commons of the day

denounced as worse by comparison with those that have preceded it. There may have been great men before Agamemnon. The tendency of mankind is to affect belief that there have been none since. "Where will you see another Canning?" Disraeli exclaimed in the House of Commons on the 12th of June, 1846, in the course of adjourned debate on the Coercion bill. (There were Coercion bills even in those good old days.) "Where will you see another Canning, a man who ruled this House as a high bred steed? The temper of the House is not now as spirited as as it was then, and I am not surprised that the vulture rules where once the eagle reigned."

Mr. Smollett—not the historian and novelist, but his great-grandnephew—speaking of the House of Commons of 1874–80 scornfully dismissed it as "an assembly of soap boilers." Why "soap boilers," did not appear from the context. Mr. Smollett's vituperation, though ready, was vague. But the meaning of the remark is clear—that, as compared with other Parliaments, the House in which Mr. Smollett sat as Member for Cambridge showed a woeful falling off.

Such line of assertion is common to a large class of humanity. In lauding times that are no more, we seem, in some subtle fashion, to enjoy the satisfaction of personally associating ourselves with them, dis severing ourselves from the degeneracy we lament. The episode in the Parliamentary career of Mr. Biggar just related, the all-night sittings, the wholesale suspension of Irish members, the long series of Bradlaugh scenes, and the free fight on the floor of the House which disgraced the session of 1893, appear to establish the charge of degeneracy. But it would be easy to parallel each one of these incidents by passages taken from daily records of the good old times.

Here is a scene, reported by the graphic pen of Macaulay, which in all attributes of rowdyism need not shirk comparison with the modern free fight. It is entered in his diary under date Thursday, June 11, 1840:

"I went from the office to the House, which was engaged upon Stanley's Irish Registration bill. The night was very stormy. I have never seen such unseemly demeanor, or heard such scurrilous language in Parliament. Lord Norreys was whistling and making all sorts of noises. Lord Maidstone was so ill-mannered that I hope he was drunk. At last, after much grossly indecent conduct, at which Lord Eliot expressed

his disgust to me, a furious outbreak took place. O'Connell was so rudely interrupted that he used the expression 'beastly bellowings.' Then rose such an uproar as no O. P. mob at Covent Garden Theatre, no crowd of Chartists in front of a hustings, ever equalled. Members on both sides stood up, shook their fists, and bawled at the top of their voices. Freshfield, who was in the chair, was strangely out of his element. Indeed, he knew his business so little that, when first he had to put a question, he fancied himself at Exeter Hall, or the Crown and Anchor, and said: 'As many as are of that opinion please to signify the same by holding up their hands.' He was quite unable to keep the smallest order when the storm came. O'Connell raged like a mad bull; and our people—I for one—while regretting and condemning the violence, thought it much extenuated by the provocation. A short and most amusing scene passed between O'Connell and Lord Maidstone, which in the tumult escaped the observation of many, but which I watched carefully. 'If,' said Lord Maidstone, 'the word beastly is retracted I shall be satisfied. If not I shall not be satisfied.'

"I do not care whether the noble Lord be satisfied or not," said O'Connell.

"I wish you would give me satisfaction," pleaded Maidstone.

"I advise the noble Lord to carry his liquor meekly," answered O'Connell.

"At last the tumult ended from absolute physical weariness. It was past one, and the steady bellows of the opposition had been howling from six o'clock with little interruption."

In respect to the Bradlaugh business, which made memorable the session of 1880, there will be found in Hansard, of twenty-nine years earlier, record of an analogous case accompanied by scenes curiously similar. In 1851, Mr. Salomons, elected for Greenwich, presented himself at the table to take the oath. He was a Jew, and, naturally, declined to repeat the words "upon the true faith of a Christian," then included in the oath of allegiance. He was ordered to withdraw, just as Sir Henry Brand, twenty-nine years later, ordered Mr. Bradlaugh to retire. Mr. Salomons, instead of obeying the order, took his seat—just as Mr. Bradlaugh did—and, just as in 1880 a section of members cheered Mr. Bradlaugh whilst the majority yelled and howled, so on this July day, dead now nearly half a century, a tempest of shouting and cheering filled the House, whilst the unsworn member for Greenwich remained seated.

The last stage of degradation seemed reached when in 1877 all-night sittings set in. They were spoken of as a new and more iniquitous development of obstruction. But during the reform debate of 1831 obstruction, at least on one occasion, reached the stage of an all-night sitting. From four o'clock on

a Tuesday afternoon till half-past seven on a Wednesday morning the House divided on the alternative motions "that the Speaker do now leave the chair," and that "this House do now adjourn." Sir Charles Wetherell, a member free from the taint of trade, was the hero of the occasion.

It is reported that his exultation at having resisted reform all through a summer night was tempered on leaving the House by the discovery that it was raining. "If I had known this," he said with an oath, pulling up his trousers to meet his waistcoat, "they should have had a few more divisions."

In illustration of the personal manners of those lamented days it may be mentioned that this fine old English gentlemen had a stubborn objection to wearing braces. The consequence was that when he addressed the House, in loud voice and with excited gestures, there became visible a broadening interval of white showing between his waistcoat and his trousers. Some one mentioning this to the Speaker, the right honorable gentleman quietly remarked, "Yes, that's Wetherell's only lucid interval."

In the matter of ordinary attire the House of Commons, following the trend of fashion, is much less punctiliously dressed than it was when the Queen opened the first session of her earliest Parliament. At that time there still lingered the decorous fashion of the high coat collar, the stock carried up to the chin, the trousers cut tight to the leg, and drawn over the boot by a strap. I have a precious print which shows the House of Commons in the session of 1821. The members are seated in the old House, dimly lighted by candelabra pendent from the roof. It is the most appallingly respectable assembly I ever set eyes upon.

I showed the print one day to a well-known member of the House of Commons. "How decorously dull!" he exclaimed, regarding the scene with quick interest. "How monotonously respectable! There does not seem to be a single Irish member among them; nor"—he added, running his eye again over the crowded benches—"nor even a lawyer."

He is, I may add, himself one of the ablest counsel at the bar.

One peculiarity, brought out by contrast with another view of the House in session more than half a century later, marks the radical change wrought in the British face in connection with the razor. In the unreformed Parliament members

are, for the most part, clean shaven. The only variation permitted is a little strip of whisker coming down the side of either cheek to the level of the nostril. In the 1874 Parliament, of which Mr. Sargent made a successful picture in its second session, there appear on the crowded benches only two bare faces. One is that of the late Mr. Fawcett, seated in his once familiar place on the front bench by the Sergeant-at-Arms' chair. The other is Mr. Hanbury, who even at this day, when he has risen to the ministerial rank, has not succeeded in cultivating either mustache or whisker. For the rest, members of the Parliament which first saw Disraeli in power as well as in office are both whiskered and mustached.

Recalling the appearance of the present House on a crowded night, one notes the further change of fashion established in the twenty-three years that separate it from the general election of 1874. More members than ever sport the mustache, while many, especially those advancing in years, dispense with whiskers, which perhaps have a tendency to invest even the young with a middle-aged appearance.

Up to the 1874 Parliament, in which many things were changed, the use of the tall hat while in attendance on the House was imperative. A Member had fair range of liberty in respect of dress generally, but he must sport a "topper." Mr. Joseph Cowen was the first man who brought the billycock hat within the sacred precincts of Westminster. But he did not flout it in the face of the Speaker. He cautiously removed it before entering the House, secreting it about his person till he withdrew. An Irish Member, Mr. John Martin, was the second adventurer on this pathway. He, one night being seated in his place, disturbed the brazen composure of the mace by covering his head with an uncompromising stiff "bowler." It was understood at the time that the Speaker privately communicated with him, gently but firmly remonstrating against the breach of decorum. However it be, Mr. Martin, though he stuck to his hat, never again wore it in the House.

A working-man member who has held office under the Crown happily compromises the difficulty. Unaccustomed to a top hat except on Sundays, occasions of christenings and the like, he could not bring himself to wear one on daily repairing to Westminster. He accordingly keeps a fine silk hat in his locker.

Arriving at the House, crowned with the meek dignity of a billy-cock, he goes straight to his locker and changes his head gear, returning his top hat to its resting place when he answers to the cry, "Who goes home?" At this day such elaborate observance seems almost pedantic. Bowlers and billy-cocks, hard and soft, are common objects in a crowded House. Worse still, straw hats have been worn under the eyes of the Speaker. Easy is the descent to Avernus. Shortly after the first straw hat glistened under the gaslit roof of the House of Commons cummerbunds set in, and legislators unrestrained by waistcoats wrestled with the gravest political problems of the day.

The dull respectability of the present House of Commons hinted at earlier is a condition of things largely due to the change in the personnel of the Irish members. After the election of 1874 they flooded Westminster with rich and rare individuality of the kind hitherto familiar to the Saxon chiefly in the novels of Lever and Lover. This type has disappeared from the present House. Perhaps the only Irish Member who to-day habitually rises into flights of humor is Mr. Tim Healy.

Among those who delighted the Parliament of 1874-80 was Mr. Delahunty, Member for Waterford City. His panacea for all the woes of Ireland had something to do with one-pound notes. I am ashamed to say, though I have often heard him discourse on the topic, there does not dwell in my mind a clear impression as to whether he desired to have one-pound notes authorized or whether he would have had them abolished. However that be, the peace and prosperity of Ireland were, according to his view, wrapped up in the one-pound note.

One Wednesday afternoon in the Session of 1878, the fortune of the ballot gave Mr. Delahunty an opportunity of dealing with this burning question. He had brought with him a small black bag, in which, according to the testimony of his compatriots, he had been accustomed to store the depositions taken before him as Coroner of the City and County of Waterford. Now, it was primarily requisitioned for holding the convincing notes of his oration. It is presumable that he had promised himself, when his task was completed, a few hours relaxation in one of the inner circles of London Society. In view of this arrangement of his evening he had, after filling his bag up to the top with manuscript notes, found just room enough to put in a comb, brush,

and a few other toilet necessities. Hauling out a handful of papers from the bag, and finding them not exactly what he wanted, he turned around and, amid an awful silence, deliberately resumed the search. Of course, the first things that came to hand were the comb and brush.

Hastily thrusting them back among the documents he made another start with his speech. But the fresh batch of papers also led to nowhere in particular. Coming to a break in his argument he turned once more to the bag, fearfully conscious of the presence of the comb and brush. With increased deliberation he rooted round, and finally, under the impression that he had at last seized the papers he sought, he produced a pair of gray worsted stockings. These approached the Irish question from a quite unexpected avenue. The House roared with laughter. Mr. Delahunty, still failing in his endeavor to come across the missing note, took the miscellaneous articles out of the bag, spread them on the bench, and with his back turned to the Speaker prosecuted his search. When at last he found the desired sheet of paper he went on as if nothing had happened, the House listening with high good humor to a story that had neither beginning, middle, nor end, through which the comb and brush came and went, as Harlequin and Columbine purposelessly flit across the stage in the intervals of pantomime business.

Among other oddities who occur to the memory, emerging out of the now distant past, was Mr. Tom Connelly, who sat on the Conservative benches and stirred up his compatriots on the opposite side with the long pole of scornful insinuation or vitriolic vituperation. There was Mr. McCarthy Downing, faithful to the last to his old leader, Isaac Butt, growing nearer and nearer in facial resemblance to a plucked jackdaw, as Butt's fortunes faded and he found himself thrust aside by the more strenuous Parnell. There was Mr. Ronayne, one of the wittiest of Irishmen. There was Frank Hugh O'Donnell, with his pleasing habit of presenting himself after a big debate had been closed by the leaders on both sides, and insisting on continuing it indefinitely. There was Dr. O'Leary, a magniloquent monocule. He was the member Dizzy won over to vote with the government on a critical division by placing his hands on his shoulder and telling him with a sigh how in personal appearance he reminded him of his old friend Tom Moore. There was Captain Stackpool, with his

hands in his pockets and his reminiscences of Lord Palmerston. "Ah," he was accustomed to say sadly, shaking his head at recurrent difficulties, "things wouldn't be like this if old Pam was here!"

Biggest, best of all, there was Major O'Gorman. The Major was a man of great height and stupendous girth. His voice, when uplifted in oratorical effort, was like a peal of thunder. These personal peculiarities lent irresistible charm to a passage in his speech, delivered soon after he took his seat, on Mr. Newdigate's annual resolution affecting conventual institutions. The Major had prepared for the purposes of his argument a dramatic conversation between a high-born Mother Superior of a convent and one of the inspectors proposed to be constituted under Mr. Newdigate's bill. When the Major, with fine mimetic art, recited the nun's part of the conversation, put on a mincing manner and assumed soft speech appropriate to the character, the House went into a fit of laughter which prevented the conclusion of the dialogue being heard. After this speech, and up to his withdrawal from the scene, the Major was a prime favorite in the House of Commons, members crowding in to hear him as if word had gone round that Gladstone or Disraeli was up.

When Dr. Kenealy moved for a Royal Commission to enquire into the conduct of the judges in the Tichborne case, the figures were, against the motion 433, in its favor one. The Major was the minority. When asked why he should have parted from his friends on such an issue, he explained that it was a warm evening, he knew the "No" lobby would be crowded, so he thought he would stroll through the other one. The Major's humor was best when it was unconscious. But he had a ready wit, as was shown in his correspondence with an importunate constituent, who urged him to obtain for him a local postmastership. The Major declined, on the ground that he would never stoop to accept a favor from a Saxon government. The man persisted, concluding a third letter with the remark: "Shure, Major, ye've only to write a line and the thing would be done."

The Major thereupon replied: "Sir, I am in receipt of your letter of the fifth inst., in which you state I have 'only to write a line' in order that you should obtain the appointment you desire. I have, therefore, much pleasure in hereby appointing you Postmaster of Ballymahooly. I am, sir, your obedient servant, Purcell O'Gorman."

Another type of the now extinct Irish member was The O'Gorman Mahon. He was, when he came back to the House, returned for County Clare in 1879, one of the few living members who had sat in the unreformed Parliament. He was again member from 1847 to 1852, returning to the old scene after an interval of 27 years. In the meanwhile he had seen fighting both by land and sea. On one occasion, offended by a Conservative member opposite whom he suspected of sniggering at an Irish Nationalist member on his feet at the moment, The O'Gorman Mahon crossed the floor, handed his "cyard" to the offender, and went into the lobby ready to complete the preliminaries of a challenge.

So recently as 1884 Sir Patrick O'Brien, another richly endowed Irish member, went even further than that in the arrangements for a duel. In debate on a local Dublin bill Sir Pat, it being two o'clock in the morning, got a little mixed as to whether it was Mr. Wm. O'Brien or Mr. Harrington who had interrupted his observations with what he described as "a guffaw." At first he leaned towards conviction that it was Mr. Harrington, of whom he incidentally remarked that "the honorable member was carrying parcels for a wage of three and sixpence a week when I represented King's County in Parliament." After staring with blood-shot eye for some time at the little band of Parnellites opposite, Sir Pat accidentally got Mr. William O'Brien in focus, and convinced himself that it was he who was the offender. Several times, leaning forward, putting his hand to his mouth, he inquired across the House, in a stage whisper, whether Mr. O'Brien was "afraid"? No notice being taken, Sir Pat hurriedly left the House, looked up The O'Gorman Mahon, engaged him as a second, and, returning, informed Mr. O'Brien that everything was settled. All he had to do was to put his man in communication with the ancient warrior. Sir Pat waited in the lobby for an hour. Mr. O'Brien made no sign, and in the cooler atmosphere of the following day the bloodthirsty enterprise was abandoned.

There was in those days a serious-mannered Irish member named Blake (not to be confounded with the ex-Premier of Canada, sitting member for South Longford), who is remembered for a brief correspondence he read to the delighted House. It was introduced in a speech delivered in debate on the Irish Sunday Closing Bill. Mr. Blake had, he confidentially informed the

House, an uncle who regularly took six tumblers of whiskey toddy daily. This troubled him, and after much thought he resolved to write and remonstrate with his relative. The following was the letter :

"MY DEAR UNCLE : I write to say how pleased I should be if you could see your way to giving up your six glasses of whiskey a day. I am sure you would find many advantages in doing so, the greatest of which would be that, as I am persuaded, it would be the means of lengthening your days."

The Uncle replied :

"MY DEAR NEPHEW : I am much obliged to you for your dutiful letter. I was so much struck by what you said, and, in particular, by your kind wish to lengthen my days, that last Friday I gave up the whiskey. I believe you are right, my boy, as to my days being lengthened, for, bedad ! it was the longest day I ever remember."

Another hero of Coercion days, now forgotten by the multitude, was Mr. Pyne, member for West Waterford. In the winter of 1887 a warrant for his arrest was issued under the Crimes Act. Mr. Pyne, who farmed a large property in Waterford belonging to the Duke of Devonshire, shut himself up in his Irish home, Lisfarney Castle. He had the trenches filled with water, the drawbridge up, took in supplies by a window in the battlements and thus lived for months, occasionally indulging in friendly conversation with the police wandering about below with the warrant for his arrest in their pockets. He came to town for the opening of the session of 1888 and was arrested as he passed down the steps at Westminster Bridge to enter Palace Yard.

The originality of his mind was further indicated upon his watch. On its dial he had roughly engraved the legend: "Pay no rent." Whenever in troubled times any of his neighbors came to him for advice as to what they should do in presence of a demand for rent, Mr. Pyne solemnly shook his head. "I cannot," he said, "express my views on the subject, for Mr. Balfour says they are illegal. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll show you what time of day it is," and, holding out his watch, the perturbed tenant read upon it the admonitory legend, "Pay no rent."

This was the comic side of Mr. Pyne's Parliamentary and political career. Tragedy swooped down just two years after his arrest in Palace Yard. Sailing from Holyhead on a return visit to Ireland the member for Waterford was nowhere to be found

when the vessel reached Kingstown. In the darkness of the night he had fallen or been swept overboard, and like ships posted up at Lloyds has never since been heard of.

A contributory reason to the disappearance from the Parliamentary scene of the Irish member of whom I have rapidly sketched a few types, is the improved machinery of public business. In the days when these heroes flourished the House of Commons was absolutely at the command of a single member. The less he was bound by the trammels of decent debate, the more abject was the submission of the House. The extremes to which obstruction was carried in the ten years following on 1875 drove the House, most unwilling to move in this direction, to reform its ancient standing orders. The adoption of the closure, violently resented as an infringement of the privilege of free speech, has done much to vindicate the freedom of the House from the tyranny of the individual. Another reform that by minimizing the recurrence of late sittings struck at the root of possible disorder, was the adoption of the rule whereby business is automatically interrupted at the stroke of midnight. That, while seeming to limit opportunity for accomplishing work, has actually increased it.

The invention of grand committees is another modern innovation whose usefulness in furthering public business is sorely handicapped by the tendency of members to insist, when a bill comes before the House on the report stage, upon debating over again the questions thrashed out in grand committee. Nevertheless, grand committees materially contribute to the furtherance of work achieved throughout a session. The pressure of that work has vastly increased since the Queen first took her place on the Throne in the House of Lords. It is ever increasing, and can be grappled with to-day only by the adoption of a scheme of double shifts, patriotic members, slaving through day-time in select committees or grand committees, coming up more or less fresh in the late afternoon to begin a new task with the Speaker in the chair.

I have not attempted in the limits of opportunity at my disposal to trace the course of the great political questions that have been dealt with in the Parliaments that have succeeded each other during the last sixty years. I have been content with the lighter task of touching upon episodes and characters, small things

which go to make up the great entity. Not to be compressed within the borders of a magazine article is the history of a succession of Parliaments which established penny postage, repealed the Corn Laws, brought India under the direct rule of the Crown, removed disabilities from Jews and Nonconformists, wrote off the paper duty, delivered newspapers from the thralldom of the stamp, established the era of commercial treaties with foreign countries, carried a succession of Reform acts, established Post Office savings banks, nourished railways, girdled the earth with electric cables, freed the Irish land, disestablished an alien church, abolished purchase in the army, gave the children free education, and bestowed upon their fathers the boon of the ballot.

Thus have the Queen's Parliaments fulfilled the mission assigned to them nearly fifty years ago by Alfred Tennyson. They have known the season when to take

“Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of freedom wider yet

By shaping some august decree,
Which kept her throne unshaken still,
Broad-based upon her people's will,
And compassed by the inviolate sea.”

H. W. Lucy.